

# EDITORIAL

## Keeping kids in school

The events of the last week justifiably have pushed anything not related to the terrorist attack of New York City and Washington D.C. off the front page and from the forefront of our thinking.

One of those developments, which hold great promise for the city, is last week's announcement that Cranston will become the sixth community in the state to have a truancy court. Already, the court has proven to reverse a pattern of excessive unexcused school absences among a select group of middle and senior high school students in Providence, Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Newport. Chief Justice of Family Court Jeremiah Jeremiah initiated it last year.

Bringing the court to the community and directing the focus on truancy cases has resulted in a significantly more responsive institution closely following students, who make a habit of playing hooky, and parents, who in some instances apparently don't care. Such cases, when referred to the family court, would frequently take a couple of months to address. Even after those cases reach court, it can be a couple of months before the offender is required to appear before the bench again. By that time, half the school year has passed.

After starting Oct. 12 at Hugh B. Bain Middle School, the Cranston Truancy Court will meet weekly. Students and a member of their family will be required to attend weekly sessions unless otherwise excused for having met attendance and other requirements set by the court.

One might ask, what's the big problem? So what if some children make a habit of skipping school?

There are many answers, but the most compelling is that we are losing a group of kids who, because of their early failures, will face an increasingly difficult time to meet their full potential and lead productive lives.

The school department and the Comprehensive Community Action services, along with other agencies, understand this. They will add a dimension to the truancy court that goes beyond addressing a student's absence as a singular motivated problem.

There will be a holistic approach to the problem. Assistance will be given to families with a myriad of issues, which could affect school attendance, even the attitude the student has toward school.

At the school level, truancy officer Tom Fazio will identify about 100 students to be referred to the new court. The line also has not been drawn at the middle school level. The court recognizes that patterns of absences start at the elementary level with younger siblings and so the court's scope will not be limited.

His reasoning is sound. Elementary students who are required to repeat grades because of poor attendance and performance lose contact with their peers and interest in school. They will likely make it to middle school, but by the time they are 16 and no longer required to attend school by law, they leave.

We're excited by the objective set forth by Judge Jeremiah and the comprehensive network Cranston intends to put into place to deal with a group of students who seemingly have lost hope in their future, or have no understanding of their potential.